



# Michigan 4-H Cloverbud Frequently Asked Questions



FOR THE 4-H PROGRAM YEAR BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 1, 2018, AND BEYOND.

Beginning September 1, 2018, the Michigan 4-H Participant Age Policy will change to reflect a younger beginning age for 4-H members. The new age for 4-H members will be 8 to 19 years old, continuing to use January 1 of the program year (September 1 – August 31) as the date of calculation. The 4-H Cloverbud experience will remain available to youth ages 5–7.

## Q. WHY WAS THE MICHIGAN 4-H AGE POLICY CHANGED?

A. [National 4-H Headquarters policy](#) defines 4-H membership as open to all youth beginning at age 8 or fourth grade. In addition, many other state 4-H programs have similar 4-H Cloverbud age policies that end the Cloverbud experience at age 7 and/or second or third grade. After reviewing these policies, and consulting with early childhood and youth development specialists, Michigan 4-H has decided to align with national headquarters and our counterparts in other states.

## Q. THE PREVIOUS CLOVERBUD POLICY STATED THAT IT WAS BASED ON RESEARCH THAT INDICATED CHILDREN AGES 5–8 WERE NOT DEVELOPMENTALLY READY FOR THE FULL 4-H EXPERIENCE. WHY IS MICHIGAN 4-H CHANGING ITS STANCE?

A. As we investigated the potential for this policy change, Michigan 4-H took time to review a variety of factors, including current research, best practices of other youth-serving organizations and policies at other land-grant universities. In partnership with the Michigan State University (MSU) Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, an in-depth literature and research review was conducted to gain insight in competitive readiness and relative age effect. The review determined that recent research and literature is conflicted regarding the appropriate age for competitive readiness. Ultimately, each child is different and needs to move to competition at different times. However, current developmental research suggests that children age 8 to 10 can begin to set goals and carry out projects over a longer period than can children ages 5 to 7, who are more interested in the process of doing something than the end product (competition). After reviewing this information with MSU Extension early childhood and youth development staff, and determining that many state 4-H programs and youth development organizations such as the National Alliance for Youth Sports open up competition to youth starting at age 8, Michigan 4-H decided to lower the 4-H member age to 8.

## Q. IF WE ARE ALIGNING WITH OTHER STATES, WHY ARE WE NOT ADJUSTING THE TOP AGE FOR 4-H TO 21?

A. The adjustment to the 4-H Participant Age Policy looked at the types of experiences Michigan 4-H provided to current 4-H members, not growing our age of 4-H participation beyond 5–19 years of age. We understand that other organizations are looking at or have expanded their age requirements to 21 years of age but Michigan 4-H is not focusing on this at the present time.

## Q. DOES THIS CHANGE MEAN ALL 4-H PROGRAMMING IS NOW OPEN TO 8-YEAR-OLDS?

A. Age appropriateness and safety will remain a consideration for all 4-H programming areas. Michigan 4-H will continue to support minimum age limits for certain learning environments that may not be appropriate for younger children. Additionally, individual county 4-H programs will also retain their right to determine the



beginning age for 4-H involvement within that county, as long as the minimum age of participation is no lower than age 5. For example, a county 4-H program can choose to program for 7- to 19-year-olds, rather than for 5- to 19-year-olds. The 4-H Cloverbud or 5- to 7-year-old participant policy is still in effect, and 4-H'ers still move from the 4-H Cloverbud experiences into 4-H experiences for 8- to 19-year-olds when they reach the 4-H age of 8.

Furthermore, Michigan 4-H partners such as fairs and exhibitions may choose to implement age limits for certain projects where they feel 8-year-old participation (or older age groups) may not be safe or appropriate (for example, market beef projects).

Alternatively, fairs and exhibitions may offer activities that are not consistent with 4-H Cloverbud policies, such as competition for youth below age 8. These are not considered a Michigan 4-H Youth Development activity and participation is the decision of the young person and his or her family.

#### Q. WHEN WILL THIS CHANGE TAKE EFFECT?

A. The Michigan 4-H Participant Age Policy will change to reflect a younger 4-H member age of 8 to 19 years old on September 1, 2018, which is the start of the 2018-2019 program year.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the 4-H Participant Age Policy, view it online at [http://msue.anr.msu.edu/resources/michigan\\_4\\_h\\_participant\\_age\\_policy1](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/resources/michigan_4_h_participant_age_policy1), contact your county MSU Extension office found on the web at <http://msue.anr.msu.edu/county> or:

Michigan State University Extension  
4-H Youth Development  
Justin S. Morrill Hall of Agriculture  
446 W. Circle Drive, Suite 160  
East Lansing, MI 48824  
Phone: 517-432-7575  
Email: [msue4h@msu.edu](mailto:msue4h@msu.edu)  
Web: [4h.msue.msu.edu](http://4h.msue.msu.edu)

